C h a p t e r 5

Program Content and

Implementation

Implementation is program design in action. Evaluating program content and implementation means determining that a program is executed as originally designed and meets a high standard of quality. Often called process or formative evaluation, this continuous evaluation assumes an explicit program design, a mutually agreed upon set of quality criteria, and faithful data collection. Chapter 5 examines evaluation as it applies to:

- curriculum and instruction;
- professional development;
- service delivery; and
- quality criteria for program self-assessment.
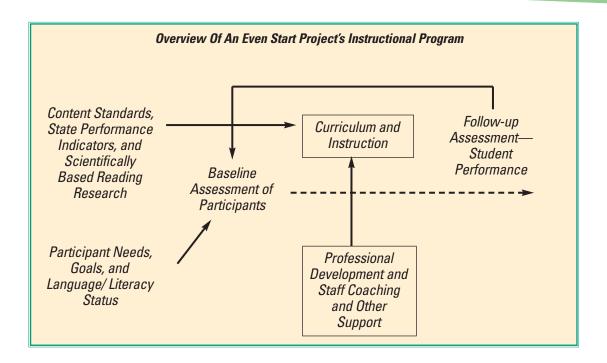
Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum and instruction are at the core of program implementation. The legislation states that the purpose of Even Start is:

to promote the academic achievement of children and adults; assist children and adults from low-income families to achieve to challenging State content standards and challenging State student performance standards; and use instructional programs based on scientifically based reading research and the prevention of reading difficulties for children and adults, to the extent such research is available. (Section 1201, ESEA [20 U.S.C. 6361] of the ESEA.)

To evaluate curriculum and instruction properly, it is helpful to grasp the complex interrelations among participants' needs and goals, content expectations, curriculum (the objectives, content materials, and sequence of materials), instruction (pedagogy and methods), assessments of learning, and staff preparation (professional development and support). The figure on page 47 presents a simplified overview of the process.

The Even Start legislation mandates that programs use instruction based on scientifically based reading research to help participants achieve state content and achievement standards. These standards serve as a roadmap for the instructional program. Four important questions are:

- *How does the program's curriculum address relevant content and achievement standards?*
- *Does the curriculum for the core instructional components use scientifically based reading research?*
- *How comprehensive is the curriculum? Is it properly sequenced?*
- *Is implementation faithful to the intended curriculum delivery?*

Overview Of An Even Start Project's Instructional Program

Content Standards, State Performance Indicators, and Scientifically Based Reading Research → Curriculum and Instruction

Participant Needs, Goals, and Language/Literacy Status → Baseline Assessment of Participants

Curriculum and Instruction

Follow-up Assessment— Student Performance

Professional Development and Staff Coaching and Other Support

Participants' needs, goals, and language/literacy status. A proper starting place in evaluating curriculum and instruction is the participants themselves. The principal question is: *How does the program match students' development and learning needs?* The answer will require a clear assessment of participants' needs, goals, and educational status. Even Start programs should offer educational interventions at the instructional level of their participants.

The evaluator helps determine how well the instructional program meets participants' needs. Evaluators often use focus groups or surveys to ask participants directly if the program is offering them the services they need. Other options include direct observation of instruction and expert review of curricula and materials. Evaluators should share their findings directly with the instructional staff; together they should develop a plan to improve instruction. Evaluators can follow this up by assessing how well the improvement plan is being implemented.

Appropriateness and fidelity of implementation. Evaluators are especially concerned with the appropriateness and fidelity of instructional delivery. Appropriateness of delivery is the extent to which the instructional program matches the development and learning needs of students. Important questions are:

■ *How does the instructional program engage the interest of students?*
■ *Does the program provide the instructional support necessary for students to meet their goals and targeted standards?*
■ *Are the cultural and English language acquisition needs of students addressed within the instructional framework?*

Fidelity of delivery is the extent to which the proposed curricula are actually used as originally envisioned. Invariably, teachers change curricula to fit their instructional programs. Do these changes add or subtract valuable content that

students will need to know? The project evaluator may have to work back from assessment results to the instructional program to learn if changes in curricula are affecting student performance. Other important evaluation questions include:

- ■ *Is the instructional pedagogy appropriate?*
- ■ *How does the instructional environment support learning?*
- ■ *How well-integrated are instructional approaches for the different instructional components?*

Assessment. Assessments used to place participants must align with the instructional program and measure student achievement of specific learning milestones or constructs. Assessments may include student portfolios or observational records in addition to standardized instruments. Chapter 3 of this Guide discusses assessment in more depth. Evaluation can focus on the relationship between instructional programs and the project's assessments. Key questions are:

- ■ *How well are assessments aligned with the project's instructional program?*
- ■ *How are assessments used to inform instruction?*
- ■ *Do the assessments evaluate local/state standards at appropriate levels of difficulty?*

Professional Development

Professional development is basic to any Even Start project, and all Even Start projects must provide staff training. As defined under the No Child Left Behind Act, professional development means high quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused activities that are designed to have a positive and lasting impact on teachers' knowledge of their academic subjects, their classroom instruction, and their understanding and use of scientifically based instructional strategies (Section 9101(34) [20 U.S.C. 7801(34)]).

Evaluating professional development takes place both at the program planning and implementation phases. Initially, evaluations are concerned with assessing staff needs, while the second phase of evaluation concerns the appropriateness and utility of professional development activities themselves.

Project staff members are a great source of information in planning professional development programs. They are in the best position to know what additional training they need in order to better meet the demands of their job. Many projects regularly and formally assess staff needs. The example on page 49 is excerpted from a professional development questionnaire some Even Start projects use annually to plan professional development activities:

Professional Development Self-assessment

1. What is your future professional goal?

2. What additional professional development do you need to be successful in your current position?

3. Family literacy programs are complex; they require skills in several different areas. For each item below, circle the number to the right that best describes your knowledge or ability.

Items	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
1. Knowledge of family literacy	1	2	3	4	5
2. Ability to recruit and enroll families	1	2	3	4	5
3. Knowledge of scientifically based research related to the project's instructional programs	1	2	3	4	5
4. Using data to improve program design and instruction	1	2	3	4	5
5. Knowledge of program evaluation and state quality indicators	1	2	3	4	5

Many Even Start projects regularly assess their professional development activities through evaluation forms distributed at the end of each professional development activity. Staff members review this information to determine the value of the activity and whether professional development activities need to be modified.

Professional development can also be the subject of a focused inquiry. Such an inquiry could examine how strategies presented in professional development activities are incorporated in the instructional setting. For example, a focused inquiry could explore how preschool teachers who attended training in scientifically based reading research integrated what they learned into their daily teaching.

Focused inquiries into professional development activities may use observational assessments that target the use of specific desired behaviors in instructional contexts. These observational assessments are most effective when they are used repeatedly by trained observers in the same classroom so that they reliably capture the instructional program. Other data sources that may demonstrate instructional integration include portfolios, student work, and lesson plans.

Service Delivery

A global term, service delivery encompasses all the activities in the program design that support implementation of the family literacy program. These include developing classes and coordinating support services, scheduling, staffing, and administration.

The evaluation of service delivery is concerned with fidelity—the extent to which the program design has been faithfully implemented. The first step is to define the program services. These definitions should be specific and correspond to the activities contained in the project's logic model. Staff members, collaborators, and participating families should all know these definitions. For example, all stakeholders in a program serving second language learners should know what qualifies an adult for English as second language (ESL) classes, what ESL classes offer, and what criteria determine when a student moves out of ESL into regular adult basic education classes.

A shared understanding of the particulars of program services is especially important in Even Start projects. By their very nature, interactive literacy activities between parents and children combine both parenting and early childhood education. Activities may be designed primarily for parents, children, or both, making it essential that staff members and parents know the focus of services. Data collection and reporting errors are likely if staff members do not share an understanding of how services are defined and recorded.

Effective evaluation depends on a clear understanding of the program design and delivery system. Variability in service delivery usually complicates evaluations in highly individualized programs or programs that operate in many sites. It is difficult to make general statements of program quality when the program's defining characteristic is variability.

Intensity is another important concept in evaluating service delivery. Intensity concerns the extent to which project participants receive the program as designed. Both service location and scheduling can influence intensity. Successful programs provide enough services (intensity) so that participants can meet their goals. The issue of equality is central to intensity. See Chapter 6 for more on program intensity. Two important questions are:

■ *How much instruction does a family need in order to meet the program outcomes?*

■ *At what point does staff conclude that an individual or family has not received an Even Start intervention because they did not participate in enough services?*

Quality Criteria for Program Self-Assessment

Many states have developed quality criteria for adult education, early childhood education, and parenting programs. Local programs can use these criteria to guide their implementation or develop their own quality criteria to address areas of specific concern such as the quality of content and implementation.

Locally developed criteria should be grounded in existing research and best practices. Criteria should be clearly and unambiguously written and concern measurable aspects of program quality. In creating high-quality criteria, it is important to remember that family literacy is greater than the sum of its major components—more than just adult education, early childhood education, interactive literacy activities, and parenting education. Criteria should include component integration, recruitment and retention, administration, and collaboration.

Some projects have formalized the assessment of how well their programs meet quality criteria by creating their own instruments or using an established criterion-based instrument. These instruments often include a scale by which stakeholders rate how well each criterion describes the project. Evaluators can use these results to identify areas where greater focus is needed for program improvement.The example below is a sample set of criteria for one aspect of program operations.

Sample Set of Quality Criteria for Program Administration		
Component: Project Administration Indicators	**Average Score** (1=Not Descriptive 5= Very Descriptive)	**Comments**
1.The leadership has an articulated vision of family literacy for the program and the role of the community in supporting this vision.		Strengths: Enhancements:
2.Program administrators' management styles foster shared decision-making and team-building that involve partners, collaborators, staff, and parents.		Strengths: Enhancements:
3.Program administrators use a management and accountability system that allows them to measure program effectiveness and outcomes.		Strengths: Enhancements:
4. The program has a written staffing plan that includes job descriptions and expectations for each position.		Strengths: Enhancements:

The point of collecting information about program quality is to improve the program. Stakeholders are encouraged to compare their quality ratings, discuss their differences, and create a plan of action that leads to program improvement. Program leaders should repeat this process at least annually, creating new plans of action as necessary. The example below shows a sample plan of action.

Sample Plan of Action					
Desired Outcomes	Actions to Take	Resources Needed	Responsibility	Timelines	Progress to Date

Together with their evaluators, project staff should review their progress in following the plan of action. The plans themselves may call for changes in program design or implementation. Such changes can be time-consuming and may necessitate "re-thinking" a program's basic elements. It may take courage to replace collaborators, change services, or redirect resources – but this may be the appropriate outcome of a meaningful evaluation. Project directors will want to check with their state agency on any proposed design changes.

The evaluator's role is to guide the project in making data-driven decisions to deliver the best services possible. Such decisions require the systematic collection of data on the key areas of implementation: curriculum/instruction, professional development, and service delivery. Together, evaluators and project staff use data for planning, assessing quality, and effecting continuous improvement. Evidence-based evaluation will lead to meaningful, positive changes for the project and for families.